

## How Do I Know If It's A Wetland?

There are generally 3 factors present to identify wetlands:

- Water is often on or near the surface all or part of the year
- Soil is poorly drained and may look gray
- Water-tolerant plants such as cottonwoods, willows and cattails may be present.

## Wetlands Aren't Always Wet!



As you can see, the amount of moisture in a wetland can vary greatly over the course of a year. During some seasons, a wetland may actually *appear* to be dry.

If you think it's a wetland avoid it.



## Wetlands Are Protected By Laws, Too...

For decades, we were unaware of the critical functions wetlands perform. The federal government even funded draining and filling them. It is estimated that about one-fourth of Montana's wetlands have been lost. In an effort to prevent further loss or degradation, federal laws and regulations have been established.

### *Executive Order 11990*

Requires federal agencies to take action to minimize destruction, loss and degradation of wetlands and to preserve natural values of wetlands on federal lands.

### *Clean Water Act Section 404*

Governs dredging and filling in jurisdictional waters, including wetlands. Jointly administered by Army Corps & EPA.

### *Endangered Species Act*

Protects wetlands that offer unique habitat for endangered and threatened species. U.S. Fish and Wildlife administered.

### *National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)*

Requires federal agencies to prepare environmental documents disclosing impacts to wetlands.

### *For More Information*

Please contact the Montana Watercourse to request more information or additional materials on wetlands and wetland-related programs.

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## We All Play An Important Role In Protecting Wetlands

Are you damaging wetlands...



USDA-NForest Service

...or acting as a steward of the land?



Jim Stutzman



Shona Campbell

Staying on trails protects wetlands!

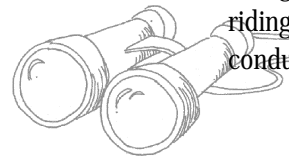


## Why Are Wetlands Important To Recreationists?

It is critical to protect the few remaining natural wetland systems in Montana. Wetlands provide many benefits to people:

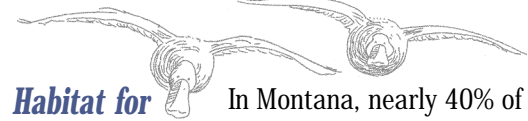
### Recreational Opportunities

Bird watching, photography, fishing, hunting, hiking, camping, horseback riding, off-highway vehicle (OHV) trail riding, and biking are all activities conducted in and around wetlands.



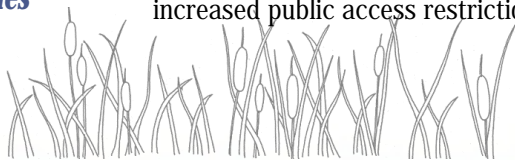
### Wildlife and Waterfowl Habitat

Wetland areas are important to many wildlife species including waterfowl. Wetland degradation negatively affects many species as well as limits hunting and fishing opportunities.



### Habitat for Threatened and Endangered Species

In Montana, nearly 40% of endangered species are found in, or are dependent upon, wetlands. Destruction of wetlands could lead to increased public access restrictions.



### Clean Water

Wetlands act as a natural water filter. If destroyed, water quality will suffer.



### Flood Control

Wetlands store water during flood periods and gradually release it, preventing property damage.

### Groundwater Recharge

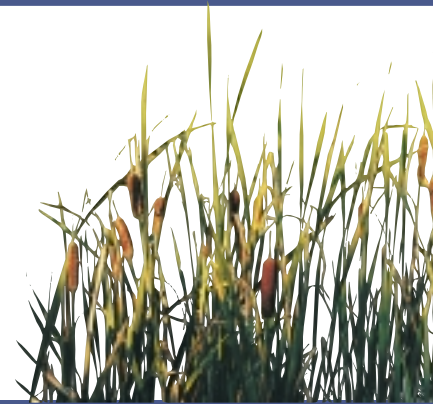
Wetlands hold water allowing it to slowly soak into the ground, replenishing wells and aquifers.

## Trails Have Many Users...

Backpackers, campers, fishermen, hikers, hunters, horseback riders, mountain bikers, and OHV riders are all users of Montana's trails. By sharing the responsibility of caring for our wetlands we can protect what they have to offer.

## Impacts of Trail Use:

- Erosion
- Pollutants
- Soil Compaction
- Wildlife/Waterfowl Disturbance
- Destroyed Vegetation
- Ruts
- Spread of Noxious Weeds
- Degradation of Water Quality



## What You Can Do...

The number of people recreating in Montana's outdoors increases every year. Follow these guidelines and take an active role in wetland preservation while you enjoy your favorite outdoor activities.



*Honor trail signs and closures.*

### KEEP YOUR TRACKS ON THE TRAIL.

*Resist the urge to create a new trail or to cut a switchback.*



*Avoid spread of noxious weeds. Use weed-seed free feed and wash vehicles.*



*Learn to read the terrain. Avoid low spots and watercourses.*

Illustrations: Jen Elliott



*Plan ahead—consider timing of the trip. If it's wet, don't go!*